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Point of View

Thesis Statement

The Safety-Pin Aesthetic

Perhaps the most influential and lasting music movement of the 1970’s, as well as my personal favorite, would the underground outbreak of punk rock. Punk is still known as anti-everything especially mainstream and establishment. Punk is a genre that I often explore and get ideas for dressing a little more on the edge of what’s popular. Punk in the seventies was widely recognized by three things: the music created, the fashion statements (or lack thereof), and the places they went to listen to their music. Personally, I think that punk rock holds a raw aggression and honesty that no other genre of music has. Punk influences me to be true to myself and to work hard to get what I want.

Punk rock is a rock music genre that developed between 1974 and 1976 in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2009). According to Wikipedia, typical punk rock instrumentation includes one or two electric guitars, an electric bass, and a drum kit, along with vocals. The music was raw, abrasive, and very fast, it’s rhythms forced and decidedly unfunky. Punk was an expression of postindustrial angst, nihilism, and revulsion (Evans, et al., 1995). According to American Decades, one of the appealing aspects of the punk movement was their complete disassociation form the mainstream. Punk affirmed the new, the bizarre, the amateur, the subversive, even the truly frightening- as long as it was not mainstream. To the punk sensibility, which celebrated the concept of difference as much as they did music, the only sin was to be commercial.

Punk’s breakdown of the “rock star” image, its skepticism of major record companies, severe pessimistic world view, and introduction of female band members who shared equal footing with male counterparts had made a profound impact on post-Seventies rock (Evans, et al., 1995). According to American Decades, punk was user-friendly and more utopian than it cared to admit: the simplicity of punk meant that anyone who wanted to could play, regardless of talent or experience. Punk was a do-it-yourself movement that was about seizing the moment, discarding history, breaking the rules, inventing new ones, and taking a stand (even a wrong one) whenever possible. Punk was a total cultural revolt. It was a hardcore confrontation with the black side of history and culture, right-wing imagery, sexual taboos; a delving into it that had never been done before by any generation in such a thorough way (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2009).

The classic punk rock look among male U.S. musicians harkens back to the T-shirt, motorcycle jacket, and jeans ensemble favored by American greasers of the 1950’s and by British rockers of the 1960’s (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2009). According to Wikipedia and Fashions of the Decade, singer/songwriter Richard Hell was a major influence of punk fashion with his androgynous and shabby clothed look, as well as his reputed invention of the safety-pin aesthetic. Originally, safety pins were used for more practical reasons such as fixing torn pants. After seeing the big punk forerunners wearing their clothing this way, punk fans incorporated safety pins into their own wardrobe as decoration and even piercings, shifting the purpose from practicality to fashion. Over time, tattoos, piercings, and metal-studded and spiked accessories became increasingly common elements of punk fashion among both musicians and fans (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2009). By 1977, the Mohican hairstyle, or Mohawk, taken from the Mohawk Indians, had become an identifying feature of punk youths. A vital aspect of the shock tactic was the overturning of contexts, giving new meaning to new ideas (Herald, 1992).

CBGB, a then little-known rock club, was founding in December 1973 by Hilly Kristal, located on the Bowery in Manhattan, New York. The full name is CBGB & OMFUG which stands for “Country Bluegrass Blues and Other Music for Uplifting Gormandizers”. Gormandizer here means a voracious eater of music (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2009). According to Wikipedia, Kristal intended the bar to feature country, bluegrass, and blues music (along with poetry readings), but it became famous as the birthplace of the American punk movement. CBGB had only one rule for a band to follow in order to play there: they had to write original music. No cover bands were booked to play there. However, regulars like Television and the Ramones sometimes played a handful of covers during their sets. As CBGB’s reputation grew, it began to draw more acts from outside New York City. For example, the club hosted the first American gigs by the Police on October 20 and 21, 1978 (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2009).

In conclusion, punk rock is a genre of simplicity and anti-fashion. Punk inspires me to be true to myself and work hard for what I want because punk is a genre of achieving your level of success all on your own. With this topic, I hoped to fully describe the significant points of punk music from the Seventies era that are remembered today. I believe that I was successful with this desire. I will continue to listen to punk music after this project is done. Punk rock influenced a lot of different genres from the 1970’s to the early 1990’s and will continue to influence other music styles into the future.